

## WOMEN, WORK, AND THE CHURCH

*This summer Ruth Stoltzfus and Luann Habegger, two members of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society, have been working on a position paper on women and work and how this relates to MCC and conference offices. Printed in this Report is a preliminary draft. We stress the word "preliminary" because it is subject to the suggestions of other members on the Task Force and your own suggestions.*

*Too often recommendations are made before the group affected has been consulted. If you are working or have been employed by MCC or a church conference office, your insights are invaluable for a report of this kind. If you would like to work for MCC or a conference office, tell us what conditions you would favor. Please send your reactions to: Luann Habegger, Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 3003 Benham Ave., Elkhart, IN 46514.*

## INTRODUCTION

If MCC and conference offices are to support the total participation of all people in the work of the Church, various employment practices and policies will need to be changed. This position paper, prepared by the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society, challenges the Church to reassess its attitudes toward women and work. Following a discussion of the problems and attitudes employed women encounter, the Task Force makes specific recommendations of ways MCC and conference offices could be restructured to allow for more flexibility, freedom, and involvement. The Task Force gives great importance to this issue for the following reasons:

1. The Church undercuts its strength and effectiveness by limiting the involvement of women.
2. A study of the positions held by men and women on the staffs at MCC and conference offices reveals that decision-making power rests almost solely in the hands of men.
3. The Church should be a model employer, taking the initiative in promoting wholeness and justice and pointing constituents in that direction.
4. The Church, as an employer, must be cognizant of the impact its practices have on the welfare and stability of its employees and their families.
5. Women and men who might be interested in serving with the Church will look for other employers if the Church does not make use of their talents or adapt to new lifestyles.

## DEFINITION OF WORK

While the first definition of work listed in the dictionary is "activity in which one exerts strength or faculties to do or perform something," society, on the whole, has tended to define work more narrowly. Work, as viewed by many people, is paid employment - proof of one's maturity. This definition would imply that women who care for their own children, the unemployed, dropouts, and the elderly are second class citizens.

American women who keep house full-time report that they spend 7.1 hours a day in preparing meals, cleaning house, laundering, mending, shopping, and doing other household tasks. While spending the equivalent of a man's working day in these various activities, homemakers are not regarded as workers. If their services are replaced by a cook, babysitter, or housekeeper, these replacements are identified as workers because their salaries contribute to the GNP. Swedish feminist Eva Moberg observed that:

The male labor market has always been based on one self-evident condition: that somebody else is doing all the little practical jobs which need to be done for an employee and his children--cooking, washing, tidying up, and mending. As for the female labor market, it has also been founded on an equally self-evident axiom: that a woman employee has another, more important job on the side.

While work can broadly be defined as any activity which produces something of value for other people, this paper deals specifically with problems of women whose work involves employment outside the home.

### FUNCTION OF WORK

In our society, work contributes to one's self-esteem, provides a significant source of personal identity, imposes structure on one's environment, and extends the number of human interactions and contacts. Women as well as men need opportunities for achievement and fulfillment that can come through work.

However, most women seek employment not for its psychological value, but out of economic necessity. Nearly two-thirds of all women workers are single, divorced, widowed, separated, or married to men who earn less than \$7,000 a year. Despite this fact, the myth persists that women as a group are "secondary" or "marginal" workers whose incomes are not as essential as men's and whose jobs are not as important to them. Since women's employment is not considered as significant as men's, neither is women's unemployment. If the unemployment rate for white males were as high as 4-6%, it's unlikely that the Government would accept this rate.

### PROBLEMS WOMEN FACE

Howard J. Ehrlich, in a study of the "Selected Differences in the Life Chances of Men and Women in the United States," concludes that "Americans have long opposed the right of women to work and to be given equal pay for equal work. Underlying their attitudes has been these two beliefs: that women's function is that of homemaking and the care of children; and that it is more important for a man to work than for a woman to work."

Ehrlich points to national surveys conducted in 1936-38 which showed that 78-83% of all Americans did not believe that married women should have a job outside the home. Both women and men agreed almost to the same degree. In two 1939 Gallup national surveys, 66-74% of the respondents felt that there should be a law prohibiting women from working. In 1969 Gallup compared 1936 and 1969 responses to the following question: "Do you approve or disapprove of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?"

	<u>1936</u>	<u>1969</u>
Disapprove	72%	40%
Approve	18%	55%
No opinion	10%	5%

Although a larger percentage of people registered approval of employed women in 1969, strong negative attitudes persist. Those women who seek employment outside the home are frequently discriminated against and exploited. Listed below are a few of the problems women face when looking for a job.

#### I. LIMITED EXPECTATIONS OF SOCIETY

The socialization of the American male and female closes off options for both sexes. It is important to note, though, that the end result of sex stereotyping is overwhelmingly

advantageous to males. The underlying belief that supports male job privilege is the belief that aggressiveness, initiative, and rationality - all considered desirable characteristics, especially for higher paid jobs - are male traits. The traditionally labelled female characteristics of passivity, supportiveness, and emotionalism are less valued by employers. While both sexes suffer from society's failure to recognize that every person embodies both "male" and "female" traits, men are favored by such stereotyping when it comes to employment.

Men benefit from an expanded world of possibilities and expectations that are presented to them from childhood on. In a survey of 134 elementary school readers in use across the country, the boys portrayed outnumbered girls five to two. Males were portrayed in 147 different jobs, females in 26. The female jobs were non-decision making, required less intelligence, and were one-dimensional and nonadventurous.

The most significant consequence of such stereotyping is not the banning of certain job categories for women, though that is a serious enough wrong. Rather, it is the effect of denying women a positive self-image, limiting their perception of possible goals and accomplishments, and depriving them of a belief in their own abilities. This undermining of the ego is more damaging to personal growth and development than any list of job prescriptions. The point is not that there must be an equal number of men and women in each job, but that the options should be open to everyone. For the concept of personal choice in the world of work to become a reality, parents, guidance counselors, employers, and women themselves must develop a greater appreciation for the differences in personal abilities and desires.

## II. DISCRIMINATION

Women face discrimination on several levels. First, the job held is often determined on the basis of sex. Due to foregone conclusions about their interests and capabilities, women are disproportionately restricted to low-paying, dead-end jobs. Consequently, the average woman worker earns about three-fifths of what a man does, even when both work full time year round. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, fully employed women high school graduates earn less income on the average than fully employed men who have not completed elementary school. Although some of this disadvantage in pay is due to the fact that women get less-skilled jobs than men, part of it can be explained by the fact that women get unequal pay for the same work. Another part reflects the lower value placed on work done largely by women compared to that done by men. Half of the difference in wages would appear to be a result of sex discrimination.

This discrimination occurs even though it is unlawful. Nearly thirty thousand employees, nearly all of them women, were found to have been underpaid by more than \$18 million under the Equal Pay Act during fiscal year 1973. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 extends Title VII coverage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (establishing equal opportunity) and brings public and private educational institutions within those provisions. The Equal Rights Amendment, if ratified, would provide an even stronger legal basis for attacking this salary gap.

Women also suffer from disadvantages in employment as a result of legal barriers in the form of protective legislation which limits the hours, overtime, and strenuousness of women's work. Consequently, fringe benefits, salaries, and promotions are limited as well. Leo Kanowitz in Women and the Law: The Unfinished Revolution points out that "Often the law 'protects' women in areas of activity where the need arises, not from biological factors, but from a constellation of cultural, sociological and legal conditions - all products of a long prior history of open subjugation of women by men." The Equal Rights Amendment would force the law to deal with the attributes of individual women, not with classifications based on biology.

### III. VOLUNTARISM

Our Mennonite tradition has stressed service -- as it should have. However, we need to guard against assuming that women should always be willing to do church work on a voluntary basis or at a substandard wage. Voluntarism can be valuable to society. It allows for personal flexibility and permits the development of worthwhile projects which otherwise would not find the funds to exist. But voluntarism can reflect an automatic assumption that homemaking is a woman's primary occupation and can ignore the need for fuller expression and serious development of her unique interests.

Sandra L. and Daryl J. Bem speak to the question of voluntarism in their article, "Training the Woman to Know Her Place: The Power of a Nonconscious Ideology." They write:

It is true, of course, that the American homemaker has, on the average, 5.1 hours of leisure time per day, and it is here, we are told, that each woman can express her unique identity. Thus, politically interested women can join the League of Women Voters; women with humane interests can become parttime Gray Ladies; women who love music can raise money for the symphony. . . But politically interested men serve in legislatures; men with humane interests become physicians or clinical psychologists; men who love music play in the symphony; and so forth. In other words, why should a woman's unique identity determine only the periphery of her life rather than its central core? Again, the important point is not that the role of homemaker is necessarily inferior, but that the woman's unique identity has been rendered irrelevant.

### IV. INFLEXIBILITY IN SCHEDULING

A growing number of women would like to utilize their professional background but do not want careers that consume most of their time and energy. When looking for part-time employment, they find that the jobs are characterized by low wages, poor benefits, routine work, and limited - if any - opportunity for advancement. Stereotypes of the part-time worker as an unreliable employee, a disruptive influence, or an untrained novice have prevented many employers from seriously exploring new possibilities.

Numerous options are open to the employer who is willing to create part-time jobs. For example, working hours could be from 9-3 or 10-4. Another variation would be schedules which allow for a four hour day, five days a week or an eight hour day, three days a week. The nature of some jobs might make it possible for two part-time employees to share a job. Extended operating hours would also permit greater flexibility.

### V. INADEQUATE DAY CARE FACILITIES

Since most women work out of necessity, the need for low cost child care is apparent. More than 4 out of 10 mothers who have children under 18 are in the labor force. Over 5.5 million of these children are under 6 years old. According to the latest estimates, care in licensed centers and family homes is available for only about 905,000 children. It is estimated that several million children need this service.

### VI. JOB RE-ENTRY

Today, most women are between 30-35 when their youngest child is ready to enter school. At this time, many choose to re-enter the job market. Re-entry for both sexes is often difficult. Since most women who marry experience some breaks in employment during their childbearing and childrearing years, women as a group feel the impact of re-entry more sharply. Their interests may have changed since they were last employed or the skills required in the field for which they were trained are no longer the same. Developing a new skill and maintaining a skill can often be both expensive and time consuming.



Older women face another kind of problem when seeking employment. While some employers discriminate against young women, assuming they will leave the job as soon as they marry, other employers prefer hiring young, attractive women. A September 1971 Roper national survey asked people to respond to the statement: "Pretty women should not get better jobs/pay than others." Of the women polled, 20% disagreed; 22% of the men disagreed. Expanding the definition of sex symbol, the Church could be considered guilty of thinking of women as sex symbols when it assumes that particular jobs are limited to members of one sex.

Relating the above problems specifically to MCC and conference offices, the following observations can be made:

- Society's negative attitudes toward employed women are reinforced by Mennonites who believe in a Biblical "chain of command."
- Decision-making rests almost solely in the hands of male administrators. Based on 1972 figures, 182 men ranked high in levels of decision-making in MCC while only 12 women received this same ranking. At the headquarters of the General Conference Mennonite Church, women employees outnumber men, 35 to 22. However, most of the decision-making responsibility rests with the men. All clerical employees are women. No women hold any of the top eight administrative posts. In the Mennonite Church, with the exclusion of women's programs, the ratio of men to women in non-secretarial positions is 12 to 1.
- A woman's job is often viewed as secondary. At MCC, first priority is generally given to the husband's assignment, sometimes at the expense of overlooking the wife's special skills. The Newton office's "head of the household" allowance would also suggest that a woman's job is seen as secondary. Under present policy, a married woman with children does not receive the \$200 "head of household" allowance. If the employee is a man, he'll receive the \$200 for his dependents.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force on Women in Church and Society recommends that MCC establish an Employment Review Committee to examine its employment policies and practices. This committee should be made up of an equal number of men and women with one member of the Task Force serving on the committee. Committee representation should come from all levels of administration. A report of the committee's findings and recommendations should be submitted to the Task Force three months after the committee's formation. After being critiqued by the Task Force, the recommendations should be presented to the MCC Executive Board for adoption. Review of policy and periodic reports to the Task Force and Executive Board on the implementation of policy should be an ongoing responsibility of the committee.

The Task Force urges the Employment Review Committee to consider making its recommendations along the following lines:

1. Establish an affirmative action program aimed at balancing sex representation on all levels. By the year 1977 the number of women serving in administrative, decision-making posts should have doubled.
2. Create more part-time jobs and ensure that salary, benefits, and promotions are comparable to full-time positions.
3. Provide more opportunities for job sharing where feasible.
4. Limit excessive overtime and out-of-town obligations which take an employee away from her or his family.

\* 5. Establish flexible operating hours, i.e. 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. to allow parents to schedule their work day around family needs (transporting children to school, etc.)

6. Consider setting aside a day care area where parents and employees can share child care responsibility on a rotating basis.

7. Develop hiring and placement policies that give equal consideration to the skills, aptitude, and training of wives and husbands entering church service.

8. Review the adequacy of maternal leave and rest privileges and make provision for paternal responsibilities.

9. Develop teams within departments that share work, decisions and responsibilities. This helps break down authoritarian, hierarchical structures which burden those at the top and bore those at the bottom.

\* Bills have been introduced in the U.S. Congress to provide, wherever feasible and after a five-year phase-in period, a flexible hours basis for 10% of all positions at all levels of the Federal Civil Service. The jobs would have to provide permanent responsible positions with standard civil service protections and prorated fringe benefits.

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#### SEXISM IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY: HISTORY AND SYMBOLS

*On May 7-8, more than fifty Mennonite women met in Washington, D.C. to examine various forces affecting the life of the family. Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether, professor of theology at Howard University, spoke to the group on "Sexism in Church and Society: History and Symbols." Printed below is an edited version of her speech.*

##### I. CLASSICAL PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

Women were seen in the patriarchal clan as dependent persons and, to some extent, as quasi-property. They never became autonomous persons who could represent themselves in the public, political, or religious structure. The patriarch was really the only person in Israelite society who was a public person; all the laws of the Old Testament were addressed to the male heads of families. Women were excluded from all political roles - both leadership and participatory. As far as the religious realm, women were denied the public, priestly role which was closely linked with political power. In other words, women's religious role - as far as it existed at all - tended to be a special charismatic or occasionally prophetic role.

In patriarchal society, religion and education were closely intertwined. Women were not permitted to study the Torah, considered in Jewish society as the highest development of mankind. Although women were denied entrance to the universities, the women's religious orders provided one way for women to receive an education. However, this education tended to be pietistic rather than scientific or philosophical. As a result of being systematically excluded from education, women made few contributions in human history.

The status of women that I've outlined continued up until the 19th century women's movement. Of course, many remnants of that status still survive both in law and in some social and economic practices. One reason the dependent status of women has persisted so long is that religious doctrine has attempted to see this status as somehow structured into the nature of the universe -- as ordained by God.

##### The Old Testament Tradition:

- Adam's Rib: Certainly, the Adam's rib tradition has been seen as establishing women in a secondary and auxiliary relationship, created to serve the male. However, there is another element of the tradition that one can find in the New Testament. There it is suggested that woman's domination by her husband is actually the result of the Fall and is, therefore, a false relationship.

### The New Testament:

- The Synoptic Gospels: Because we are unfamiliar with Jewish law, we have failed to realize to what degree Jesus attacked the traditional attitudes toward women. Leonard Swidler, in his article "Jesus Was a Feminist," points out the various breakthroughs in the Synoptic Gospels. (Read Swidler's article in the Task Force packet PERSONS BECOMING).

- St. Paul: Paul is, to say the least, ambivalent on the subject of women. In Paul's letters it is evident that there were a number of prominent women who were operating both as local leaders and as apostles. Paul does not use the word apostles to refer to the 12 disciples; he uses the word to refer to the travelling evangelists. While the role of women as apostles has been played down, Paul's injunction for women to keep silent in the church has continually been uplifted. Paul contradicts his command for women to keep silent in I. Cor. 11 where he instructs women to cover their heads when they preach and prophesy in church.

It would seem that the second generation of followers of Christ who are represented in the pastoral epistles revert back to the patriarchal structures as seen in the interpolated passage on women keeping silent. On the one hand, there is a vision of liberation which comes out in Galatians where Paul says that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. On the other hand, the church doesn't quite have the nerve to grasp the liberation envisioned by Christ either in relationship to women or slaves and falls back to traditional social structures.

### II. BODY-SOUL DUALISM

- *Aristotle*: The second strata moves beyond the dependent, auxiliary status of classical patriarchal society to a paranoia toward women. This attitude is rooted in the Greek tradition which regarded the body as evil, as some kind of dangerous moral rebel that is going to pull down and destroy the higher spiritual self. In other words, there is an antagonism between body and soul or the carnal, feeling self and the intellectual, spiritual self. Aristotle wrote that those people who represent the carnal principle are intrinsically servile and must be dominated by the head. This body-soul dualism was extended to a male-female dualism: men symbolize the head or the rational side of human nature while women represent the body or the sexual side. Sexism, racism, and class were all seen in terms of this dualism of the dominators and the dominated.

Paranoia toward women also had roots in ancient blood taboos. Women were looked on as being intrinsically unclean; therefore, women should not approach the altar or assume any priestly responsibilities because they would put a hex on the male magic, so to speak.

- *Church Fathers*: The attitude that women were unclean, dangerous sexual beings who would destroy the spiritual development of males was typical of the church fathers. St. Augustine believed that women pulled the manly mind down from its heavenly heights to wallow in the flesh. The body is not only to be dominated but to be suppressed.

Classical Christianity, it seems to me, created a schizophrenia towards women. On the one hand, women represented the diabolical. On the other hand, through the Virgin Mary, they represented spiritual femininity. Perhaps the most exaggerated expression of the violent schizophrenia between the Virgin and the witch was evidenced in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries with the most highly developed mariology (the cult of the Virgin) and at the same time a tremendous outbreak of witch hunts with nearly a million women burned at the stake. In one of the witch hunter's handbooks, the word *feminine* is interpreted as lacking in faith (*fe - faith, mina - lacking*). This is construed as meaning that women are intrinsically faithless, that they lack authentic or religious faith.

### III. DOMESTICATED WORLD OF RELIGION

The third strata, to some extent, branches off from mariology. In the Middle Ages, the spiritual feminine was confined primarily to one woman, Mary. Later, the spiritual

feminine was secularized in the concepts of courtly love. Even in courtly love, the idealized love affair could happen only outside of marriage. With the Reformation came a new effort to bring some of the traditions of love and marriage together.

The church fathers had some very negative attitudes toward marriage, children, and procreation. Today, we so automatically idealize the family that we forget that classical Christianity had few good words to say about the family. It is only with the Reformation that the family is lifted up again as a basic unit of the church. But in the process, women were pushed back into a dependent, patriarchal relationship and the religious orders, which did hold up an alternative life style for women, were to a large extent destroyed.

The religious order, however much it may have been based on certain sexual repressions, offered women the only alternative life style to marriage, provided them with an education, and gave them leadership roles. It is interesting to note that just about the only women who are the heads of hospitals or the heads of colleges in our country today are nuns. I might also add that Catholicism, for all its problems, did produce a few great saints while Protestantism tends to produce pastors' wives. There is nothing wrong with pastors' wives except that a pastor's wife is very clearly identified in relationship to a man whereas the great saint of the past existed in her own right.

In the 19th century, with romanticism, spiritual femininity becomes more generalized. Romanticism partially reverses the Middle Ages notion that women are more carnal and less pious than men. The 19th century romantic tended to view women as more pious and more religious than men.

In the Middle Ages, being religious was the key to power. But by the 19th century, being religious was rapidly becoming irrelevant to real power. Morality becomes divorced from rationality; piety and religion are divorced from the public order. The Middle Ages split society between the church and the world. A new split develops in the 19th century - a split between the home and the world. The home, presided over by women, represents the realm of piety, interpersonal relationships, and morality. Religion becomes essentially private. The public world of corporate power, on the other hand, has been amoral and unrelated to religion. It is the world of hard, technological rationality -- the world of men. Because the 19th century domesticates the world of morality, spirituality, and piety, the clergy face an identity crisis. The secular, public world of "real men" is the one of technical rationality and materialism. The clergy, presiding over the world of religion and piety, now find themselves presiding over the world of women and are looked upon by the "real men" as "feminized men."

It is this kind of schizophrenia that we are basically dealing with today. Former Vice President Agnew described bomber pilots as manly while using the word effete to describe war resisters. What does the word effete mean? Essentially, it means effeminate. In other words, men who try to drag religion and morality into the public realm are effeminate. This clearly illustrates our present schizophrenia which assumes that "real men" are associated with hard, technological rationality and blunt materialism without any regards to religious or moral questions. Morality, religion, and spirituality fall into a private, feminine world which is all right for Sunday but shouldn't be dragged into the world of "real men." At the same time Nixon is talking about God and displaying his kind of religiosity, his world of politics is being exposed as totally amoral.

Although the earlier split between males as rational and moral and women as sexual was bad enough, in some ways I think the new split between the effeminized, private culture of home, presided over by women, and the amoral, technical culture, presided over by men, may ultimately be even worse and certainly extremely destructive for the entire context of our public culture. It is this ethic, if one can call it an ethic, which is rapidly destroying the world.